

## **Mission:Reflexion – 200 Jahre Berliner Mission**

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### **Chapter 4: A Review of the Beginnings of the Berlin Mission Society (Berlin I) in Tanzania 1891-1945 by Faustin Leonard Mahali**

#### **1.0 Introduction**

The missionaries' reports and historical accounts reveal that Berlin I undertook initiatives to establish the Lutheran church in Tanganyika in 1891. Berlin I missionaries came concurrently with trade expeditors, colonial rulers, and military officials. The scramble for Tanganyika between the British Empire and German East Africa colonial companies and Arabic hegemony in Zanzibar brought crushes and uncertainties for people living along the coastal area and in the hinterland. Local resistance against colonialism and the two World Wars negatively affected the mission work intended to spread the gospel and diaconal services. However, until 1945, Berlin I had succeeded in maintaining the stations which became part of the founding churches of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania. The account provides the beginning of Berlin I with local ethnic groups from the Southern Highlands to the coastal area of the Indian Ocean. This part also briefly tells the story of Berlin I's encounter with ethnic groups and colonial contexts during missionary activities and evangelization. Lastly, a concise elucidation of the contribution of Berlin I to the establishment of the ELCT and its social service institutions.

#### **2.0 How Berlin I Started Its Work in South-Western Highlands of Tanzania**

Berlin Mission Society (BMS), known as Berlin I, coincidentally began its mission activities with the German colonial occupation of Tanganyika in July 1890, when they arrived on 25th September 1891 in the Southern Highlands of Tanzania. Under the leadership of Alexander Merensky, missionaries who came with him from South Africa were peacefully received by chiefs and subchiefs in the local territories of the Nyakyusa. Missionaries built the first station on the hills arising from Lake Nyasa at Ipagika on 2<sup>nd</sup> October 1891. They dedicated this place to the secretary of Berlin I, Hermann Theodor Wangemann and called the place Wangemannshöhe. Their quick expansion to other ethnic groups was contributed by the movement of people through ethnic groups' social, political, and

economic movements. Missionary reports also admit the contribution of African translators from the Zulu ethnic group who accompanied the missionaries to the local chiefs. Their presence assured the chiefs about the humanness of the missionaries. Another factor was the presence of German colonial officials and trade expeditors who contributed to mapping potential missionary fields and sometimes provided security to the missionaries. Not least, the religious African context, which was not often mentioned by missionaries, was another factor for them working in a hospitable environment.

Berlin I first advanced to nearby villages in the Nyakyusa area to Manow (1892), Ikombe (1893), and Mwakaleli (1893), and the New-Wangemannshoehe, Itete (1899). In the second phase, they expanded to the Ukinga mountains at Bulongwa (1895) and Tandala (1897). In the third phase, they quickly moved to establish stations in Bena and Hehe regions, at Kidugala (1898), Mufindi extending to Ulunga Valley (1898), Mpangile [Yakobi] (1899), Lupembe (1899) and Ilembula (1900), Emmerberg (1898), and Muhanga (1898). In the last phase they established stations in Wanji and Pangwa regions to cover the North of Southern Highlands at Magoye (1900), Milow (1902), Brandt (1908), and Lwamate (1913) and Kingori (1913) mission stations among the Wambungu and Wamasagati. Muhanga station in Uhehe region was moved to Pommern (1910).

In 1903, Berlin I also inherited the work of the Berlin III Mission Society in Dar es Salaam, which started in 1887. It took over the following stations: Dar es Salaam (1887), Kisarawe (1892), and Maneromango (1895). Berlin I extended to the Uluguru region and established the Schlesien (1913) seminary in Morogoro.

No mission centres were established between 1904 and 1907 because of the *Maji Maji* uprising. After the uprising, which took place between 1905 and 1907, Berlin I developed five other stations. The same applies to the two World Wars between 1914 and 1918 and 1939 and 1945 when the growth of Berlin I missionary work suffered a blow. The challenge of these wars brought new perspectives on mission when the emphasis shifted to empowering local people to run the established stations. I attribute these initiatives by Berlin I missionaries to having laid the foundation of the local church's strong roots.

### **3.0 Intercultural Encounter of Berlin Missionaries in Tanganyika**

Reports from missionaries portray Christianity as a means of civilization. Missionaries also make general references to Africans and their actions as an outcome of their heathenness. In a way, the missionaries became a blind spot for missionaries of the religious values embedded in the African way of life when they spread the gospel of Jesus Christ. From this perspective, they saw marital contracts, especially polygamy, constituting a high level of primitive life without real love. Africans, especially men, were seen as the most violent against women. In this part of the world, it was as if there existed

forced marriages, and a woman was only an object of bearing children and labourer for the economic gains of men. Attempts to study cultural actuality were more about verifying the differences between cultures rather than learning some good practices to bring them into Christianity.

Missionaries also believed that the worldview of local people was determined by their beliefs in superstition, witchcraft, and evil spirits. However, these reports hardly mention whether they experienced local people worshipping their gods. Missionaries did not attribute hardship in their mission to the existence of local religions. People from these groups did not like to join Christianity simply because they wanted more wives and to continue with an uncivilized way of life. Paradoxically, missionaries used the language existing in the religious contexts of the local people to translate the gospel and church traditions. The words, however, were carefully chosen to avoid what were considered practices of the heathens. For instance, when it was now a must to ordain local pastors, the title of the pastor became a shepherd (*mchungaji*) and not a priest (*kuhani*).

Again, the local medical capacity seemed not to work since it was accompanied by rituals incompatible with scientific medicine. Missionaries' reports about medical care in the communities they met indicate the superiority of the advancement of medicine in the countries they came from. However, African medicines have to be categorized into ritualized and non-ritualized. The study of using non-ritualized medicines could be equated with the so-called scientific medicines. Ritualized medicine is popular since it is associated with fear of the loss of life and fertility. When missionaries met the local people practising various medical and other rituals, their foreignness to those practices strengthened their verification of the heathenness of the members of the communities they met.

Berlin I missionaries also encountered Islam along the trade routes and coastal area. The reports indicate how difficult it was to do a mission among Muslims. In addition, the annual colonial conferences in Berlin left requests to colonial administrators to provide favourable conditions to do missions to Muslims unaccepted for fear of bringing clashes with Muslims, most of whom were employees in different colonial administrative positions. The initiative to build a Schlesien seminary in Morogoro and teach Kiswahili was probably one strategy to reach out to Muslims. The contribution of the emphasis on Kiswahili in Tanzania has been visible not only in the establishment of strong institutions of the church but also in the nation. Kiswahili and English are Tanzania's official languages.

#### **4.0 The Indelible Marks of Diaconal Services of Berlin I in the Period between 1891-1945**

When Berlin I missionaries arrived in each centre, they were equipped with knowledge of the place, literature (especially Bible and secular books), medical kits and prescriptions, farming tools and seeds, and apprenticeship know-how and tools. They introduced 4-dimensions approach to mission namely “church-school-health-charity/development.” They also changed a house (oikos) architecture that brought new changes in the importance of a compound as a social space for an extended family. The establishment of *mission villages* brought a new form of housing and marital status. Christians living in the *mission villages* were fenced and prohibited from having more than one wife. The houses adapted to the cold climate of the mountains. The major difference was that local people built thatched houses with fireplaces at the centre without widows to protect themselves from the cold, while European houses had windows with chimneys.

One of the crucial achievements of Berlin I was the establishment of Bible schools in Kidugala and Manow before the outbreak of World War I in 1914. At this time, they had already established more than 135 bush schools. Between 1919 and 1938, German missionaries were allowed to return to Tanganyika, which was now under Britain's trusteeship. During this time, they strengthened the training of local people as pastors and evangelists. During World War I, other missionaries from other neutral countries, such as the Swedish Evangelical Mission (SEM) missionaries, were allowed to work in Tanganyika in 1938. In this period, it is obvious that German missionaries concentrated on rebuilding the work destroyed by World War I and strengthening the theological training of the local people. When Berlin I missionaries were again repatriated in World War II, they had already built a strong base of pastors and evangelists. For instance, the last German missionary to stay in the Bena-Konde church, Martin Priebusch, supported the election of a local pastor to lead the church, something which could not be allowed by British colonial officials.



The second area was the establishment of medical care and facilities. In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, Berlin I had established a health station to care for many people who suffered from tropical and other diseases. Some nurses came with missionaries from Germany. A good example is the nurse Nice Sebastian, who worked in Kidugala from 1911. This woman could be a model for volunteers in the mission of God. As I discussed in the encounter section, medical care was taken as a supplement to local medicine to avoid association with the ritualization of medicine.

The last part concerns missionaries' involvement in economic activities. Missionaries also brought new crops such as wheat and potatoes and cash crops such as coffee, sugar plants, and maize. In addition, missionaries were accompanied

by apprentices who carried tools to build churches and houses for pastors and evangelists. Youth vocational training was part of the missionary strategy to strengthen the church's work. Berlin I, established in all of its stations, units for vocational training. Some vocational training, such as Mafinga Lutheran Vocation training, had been popular even to the end of the 20th century.

## 5.0 Conclusion

Despite some missionaries' weaknesses in understanding the context, Berlin I's significance to the establishment of the church in Tanzania cannot be underestimated. Berlin I established mission stations, which later became churches that established the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania. The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania, the Southern Zone and the Evangelical Lutheran Church, the Uzaramo-Uluguru became among the seven churches which united to form the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanganyika.

Some of the health stations established by Berlin I became referral hospitals. In this respect, Ilembula Hospital was built and serves many Tanzanians even today. The *Maji Maji* and the two World Wars taught European missionaries to recognize Africans as human beings capable of sustaining the mission work left by Germans after being

repatriated in two World Wars. During their absence, the church continued its activities through local pastors and evangelists. People learned from missionaries to garden, plant food and cash crops, improve their house construction, establish small businesses in transport and shops, and sell products in local markets. It means that now local people had the competence to work in the church, hospitals, schools and economic institutions.

Therefore, it is important to note in this brief history that Berlin I helped to establish the Lutheran Church in the context of ethnic clashes, colonial influence through Arabs and Europeans and global wars. These challenges did not only bring setbacks but also brought positive awareness that both Arabs, Europeans and Africans were human beings, and all needed the gospel of Jesus Christ. I believe BMS contributed to the 4-Selfs model of establishing the church. The encounter of Berlin I with local people spelt a self-propagating, self-planting, self-governing and self-sustaining church. Today, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania has grown to more than six million Christians and is the second largest church in Africa after the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus.

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